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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000288

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SUBJECT: IRAQI PARLIAMENT SPEAKER MASHADANI ON PROVINCIAL POWERS, BUDGET, OTHER ISSUES

Classified By: PolCouns Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: COR Speaker Mashadani told us on January 30 that he expects the Provincial Powers law to pass the CoR on February 4. He does not agree with those arguing that a date for elections should be in the law but does believe that elections should be held as soon as possible, hopefully within this year. The debate on 17 percent versus 13 percent for the KRG is a serious obstacle to budget passage. Mashadani liberally criticized the Kurds for acting only in the interests of their region. The Speaker said that the Iraqi negotiators on a bilateral strategic framework agreement should be from the GOI, with the MFA in the lead. He disagreed with those who want to put political party representatives (i.e. CoR bloc leaders) in the mix, saying that they would go in with their own agendas. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Political Counselor met with Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani on January 30 at his Baghdad residence. Mashadani aide Alex Terchanian along with Poloff and Political Specialist also participated.

¶3. (C) Mashadani said he is giving the Provincial Powers law priority over the budget. He is confident that it will pass on Monday (February 4). All of the debate comes down to the fact that ISCI wants more authority for the provinces while Dawa wants a stronger federal government. Fadhila, short sightedly, only cares about the role of the current Basra governor. IIP's position on the debate over decentralization has been weak, and Mashadani claimed he had to exert his own authority to give the Sunni Arab view. He declared that he has given enough time to the members to sort out their differences and so now he wants a final reading with amendments getting an up or down vote from the CoR.

¶4. (C) Mashadani said that some want to set a date for elections in the Provincial Powers law. He does not agree but does think that elections should be held this year. He spoke at some length about his efforts to get the Elections Commission moving and ready for elections. PolCouns urged him to press the IHEC to move forward on preparations for elections, but Mashadani said the commission had to act on its own initiative, otherwise it would appear as though it was being influenced. Large numbers of Iraqis did not participate in 2005 provincial elections and it's time they had the chance to do so. Many political groups won't get the people's support because of their leaders' behavior, Mashadani predicted, and elections would produce new leadership. He declared that a "closed list" electoral system would not be acceptable to Iraqis. Tawafuq, for instance, is not trusted by the public because the people did not know for whom they were voting. Mashadani went on to criticize efforts by PM Maliki's office and others to influence the IHEC and vowed to stand in the way of such interference. He singled out the PM's chief of staff as behind efforts to interfere with the electoral commission, stating that he acts "as if he were working for Saddam

Hussein".

15. (C) On the budget, Mashadani said key leaders have not resolved their differences. KRG President Massoud Barzani is insisting on 17 percent for the Kurdish region, but PM Al-Maliki only wants to give 13 percent, undercutting the budget his government was asking the CoR to approve.

According to Mashadani, the PM wants the COR to take on Barzani's demand by reducing the percentage. The Kurds have threatened to have President Talabani veto the budget if the amount is reduced. Warming to the theme of blaming the Kurds, Mashadani advocated passing the budget over the objections of the Kurdish bloc, forcing Talabani to use a veto. Then it will be obvious to all who is responsible for holding up the work of government. He charged that the Kurds in the COR are completely under the thumb of Talabani and Barzani, so even if they think differently they are too scared to stand up for what they believe. He hinted darkly at continued oppressive means used by the KRG to keep people in line. They are not acting like Iraqis, Mashadani stated. Second Deputy Speaker Tayfour and the Kurdish delegates just want to get what they can for Kurdistan and go home. The Peshmerga debate illustrates this attitude. It is unacceptable that they want the federal government to pay for forces entirely under KRG control.

16. (C) Regarding the January 26 PCNS meeting at which Maliki briefed CoR leaders on the framework for GOI LTSR talks with the U.S., Mashadani said VP Hashimi and PM Maliki favored including political party representatives in the negotiations. Mahsadani thought this a bad idea, since they would pull the Iraqi side in various directions. By his account, others at the discussion agreed with him. The talks should be in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

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supported by the Ministries of Planning and Defense, Mashadani said. The PM is ultimately responsible for coming up with a draft agreement, passing it to the PCNS, and then sending it to the CoR. Mashadani was interested in what would happen to such an agreement in the U.S., given the election year and frequent statements from candidates calling for troop withdrawal from Iraq. He said Iraqis would want to see that the U.S. Congress, and in particular Democratic party leaders, approved the terms of a bilateral agreement with Iraq. PolCouns told him it was normal in such negotiations for the administration to brief appropriate Congressional committees on a regular basis, but bilateral agreements such as that currently envisioned with Iraq did not trigger U.S. constitutional requirements for Congressional ratification.

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